

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Claims 13, 15, 17, 19 and 21-32 are active. Claim 13 has been amended to incorporate the limitations of Claims 14 and 16. Claims 18 and 20 have been canceled. Claims 21-32 have been revised to depend from Claim 13. Favorable consideration of the above amendment is respectfully requested.

The Applicants thank Examiner Reddick for the courteous and helpful discussion of October 22, 2003. The difference in water content of the film in the prior art process (less than 10%) and that in the claimed process (10 to 50% by weight) was discussed. The Examiner suggested further distinguishing the claimed process by further limiting the water content of the film, for instance, to 30-50% by weight, or to an intermediate value described by the specification further away from 10%. It was also suggested that Applicants further elaborate on the functional differences between film produced by the prior art process, e.g., on the basis of differences in retardation in a transverse direction. In view of the Examiner's concerns, to further distinguish the claimed process the Applicants have now incorporated the limitations of Claims 14 and 16 into the body of independent Claim 13. Moreover, Claim 20 has been canceled, and Claims 21-23 are presented as product-by-process claims depending from Claim 13. Favorable consideration is therefore respectfully requested.

REQUEST FOR WITHDRAWAL OF FINALITY

The Applicants respectfully request that the finality of the last Official Action be withdrawn, because the Official Action introduces a new ground of rejection that was not necessitated by amendment nor based on information submitted in an information disclosure statement, see MPEP 706.07(a). Claims 4-9 were previously deemed allowable. However, rejected Claims 13 and 14 correspond to Claims 4 and 5. Thus, the rejection of Claims 13 and 14 raises new issues. Accordingly, should the present amendment not place Claim 13 in

condition for allowance, the Applicants respectfully request the finality of the prior Official Action be withdrawn.

Rejections--35 U.S.C. §§102(b) and/or 103(a)

Claims 13-19 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being obvious over JP 5337967 (Abstract/partial translation, pp. 1-4) and Claims 20-32 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by, or in the alternative, under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being obvious over JP 5337967 (Abstract/partial translation, pp. 1-4).

JP5337967 does not anticipate or render obvious the claimed method, because it is directed to a method in which a PVA film is dried up to a water content less than 10%, and then peeled off, while that of the invention has a water content ranging from 10% to 50% by weight when peeled after passing through the first drying surface. Page 1 of the English translation JP 5337967 referring to col. 2, lines 6-14, indicates that "the water content of the film at the stripping stage from the casting base material is controlled under 10% by weight". On the other hand, Claim 13 requires a water content in the range of 10-50%.

Moreover, JP5337967 does not disclose nor suggest the features of drying both the surfaces of the PVA film by the first and second drying surfaces, respectively, and peeling off the PVA film from the first drying surface when the water content is within the range from 10 to 50% as now required by Claim 13. By drying the one side of the film by the first drying surface and the other side of the film by the second drying surface, the film is dried uniformly from the both sides of the film and hence, the quality of PVA film is improved so that color irregularities in the final product (polarization film) do not occur.

JP5337967 does not anticipate or render obvious films produced by the method of Claim 13, because these films have distinct properties based on their production by such a method. For example, as shown by the previously submitted Declaration, these films do not

exhibit the wrinkling produced by the method of JP5337967 where the film has a low water content of 9% during processing. The previously submitted Declaration shows that films produced by the method of JP5337967 comprise wrinkled sections where the difference in retardation between two points separated by 1 cm along the TD direction is greater than 5 nm. The presence of this wrinkle in the film produced by the prior art method produces undesirable color irregularities in film products.

As discussed in the Specification on page 2, lines 10-21, many attempts have been made to reduce color irregularities, such as decreasing thickness irregularity or birefringence irregularity. It has been found that it is difficult to reduce color irregularities at the level problematical in the final product (polarizer) having recent increased performance. Further, it has been found that the decrease of thickness irregularity or birefringence irregularity can not be an effective solution to reduce color irregularities, since even if thickness irregularity and birefringence irregularity are evaluated as irregularities of the whole film surface, they do not correctly correspond to actual color irregularities perceived by human eyes.

JP5337967 is within the range of the prior art discussed in the subject specification. JP5337967 takes up the thickness irregularity and the birefringence irregularity at points in 5 cm pitch (paragraph [0022] in the partial English translation), and does not recognize retardation differences within such small region of about 1 cm pitch as in the present invention.

To show the differences between the film of JP5337967 and that of the present invention, PVA film was obtained under the conditions specified in Example 1 of JP5337967 and then subjected to the same treatment as in Example 1 of the subject specification to produce a polarization film. The resultant PVA film and polarization film were evaluated. The test results and methods are presented in the Declaration and show that a PVA film with a small retardation difference within a small region of 1 cm pitch cannot be obtained due to

the frequent occurrence of wrinkles. PVA films made by the method described by JP 5337967, had wrinkles and thus exhibited a value in retardation between two points separated by 1 cm of the PVA film of 10 nm where the wrinkle occurred (see page 4, line 2, of the Declaration). The wrinkle occurred in the PVA film due to lowered adhesiveness of the PVA film with the stainless steel belt due to low water content (e.g., 9.0% by weight, see page 3, line 19, of the Declaration) of the PVA film at the stripping stage. When polarization films were produced from these PVA films, they contained color irregularities due to dyeing irregularities where the wrinkle occurred and thus were considered inappropriate as a final product. See page 4 of the attached Declaration. Accordingly, by the use of such PVA film of JP5337967 any polarization film of good enough quality with small retardation difference can not be industrially produced.

On the other hand, the method of the invention produces a film characterized by a difference in retardation between two points separated by 1 cm along the TD direction of the film of 5 nm or less. The present claims explicitly require that the water content of the PVA film when peeled after passing the first drying surface range from 10-50% as thus would produce films which differ from that of JP5337963, which has a lower water content (e.g., 9.0% by weight) at the stripping stage. The water content when the film is peeled off from the first drying surface is also important, because when the water content is over 50% by weight, color irregularities occur when the film is made into a polarization film and a good quality polarization film is not obtained, and further, retardation irregularity of the PVA film within a small region of about 1 cm increases easily, see the specification, page 6, lines 25-29. When the water content is less than 10%, the PVA film tends to be peeled off too early because of a poor adhesiveness between the film and the two drying surfaces. Accordingly, by using the claimed methods a wrinkle is not manifested in stretching and the retardation

irregularity within a small region of about 1 cm does not increase easily, see the specification, page 5, lines 7-12.

Unlike the wrinkled films produced by the method of JP5337963, which comprise a wrinkle having a difference in retardation along the TD direction of the film of 10 nm, films produced by the method of Claim 13 exhibit a difference in retardation between two points separated by 1 cm along the TD direction of the film of 5 nm or less. As described by page 3, lines 6-22, of the specification, the film of the invention manifests fewer color irregularities and furthermore and does not easily produce wrinkle in stretching. The suppression of the wrinkling problem is specifically remarkable in the film having a width of 2 m or more, see e.g., the specification, page 7, lines-14-19.

Response to Examiner's Comments on the Declaration. The Examiner was concerned that the previously-submitted Declaration might not show distinguishing differences in retardation between films produced by the claimed process and processes comparative to the prior art. For example, page 5 of the Official Action indicates that page 3, lines 36-37, of the Declaration shows that the difference in retardation between two points on a film produced by the method of JP '967 was 3 nm, and that this 3 nm value meets the limitation of "less than 5 nm" set forth for the claimed PVA film by the claims. Absent defects caused by the prior art process the value for the PVA film is 3 nm. However, when this film was continuously produced by the prior process, as indicated in the Declaration, "a wrinkle occurred in a PVA film every about 2000m of length. The value of difference in retardation between two points separated by 1cm of the PVA film where the wrinkle occurred was **10nm.**" Accordingly, the Applicants respectfully submit that the Declaration demonstrates the importance of selecting a process using a film having a water content of at least 10%. That is when a water content of only 9% was used wrinkling occurred.

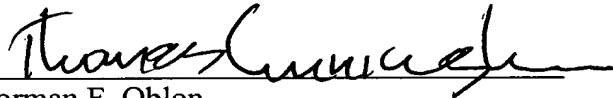
Therefore, as JP5337967 does not disclose or suggest the superior process of Claim 13 for reducing film wrinkling, nor the superior wrinkle-free films produced by such a process, the Applicants respectfully request that these rejections be withdrawn.

CONCLUSION

In view of the above amendments and remarks, the Applicants respectfully submit that this application is now in condition for allowance. Early notification to that effect is ardently solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

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